DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 358 912 PS 021 016

AUTHOR Steinberg, Adria, Ed.
TITLE The "Best" of the Harvard Education Letter.
INSTITUTION Harvard Univ., Cambridge, Mass. Graduate School of Education.
REPORT NO ISSN-8755-3716
PUB DATE 92
NOTE 25p.
AVAILABLE FROM Harvard Education Letter, P.O. Box 8900, Braintree, MA 02184 ($4).
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055) -- Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT Harvard Education Letter; 1992

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Apprenticeships; Child Development; Classroom Environment; Classroom Techniques; *Cooperative Learning; Early Childhood Education; Educational Innovation; Elementary Secondary Education; Homework; *Kindergarten; Parent School Relationship; *Peer Relationship; Popularity; Reading Difficulties; Reading Programs; *School Readiness; *Student Alienation; Student Motivation; Teacher Student Relationship; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS Comer (James P); Gilligan (Carol); *Reading Recovery Projects

ABSTRACT

This document consists of a selection of the best articles previously published in the "Harvard Education Letter." It contains the following articles (without citing the issue in which they originally appeared): (1) "School-Parent Relationships that Work: An Interview with James Comer"; (2) "Unpopular Children"; (3) "Kindergarten: Producing Early Failure?"; (4) "Reading Problems: Is Quick Recovery Possible?"; (5) "Cooperative Learning: Making It Work"; (6) "What To Do about Homework"; (7) "Is There Life after High School? Developing Apprenticeship in America"; (8) "Girls at 11: An Interview with Carol Gilligan"; (9) "Why Kids Give Up on School--And What Teachers Can Do about It"; and (10) "Girls: Drawbacks of Early Success?" (MM)

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The Best of The Harvard Education Letter

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Published by the Harvard Graduate School of Education

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School-Parent Relationships That Work: An Interview with James Comer

Twenty years ago, James Comer, a child psychiatrist at the Yale Child Study Center, helped initiate a school-improvement process in the New Haven elementary schools that had the lowest achievement and worst behavior and attendance records in the city. Today, as director of the Center's School Development Program, Comer brings educators from around the country to these schools to observe the positive social and academic climate.

Visitors are impressed not only by what they see but by the hard data. On a variety of measures—including student and teacher attendance, achievement tests, number and severity of behavioral problems, and teachers' requests for transfer—the demonstration schools now rank among the best in the city.

Comer is the author of the autobiographical Maggie's American Dream: The Life and Times of a Black Family *(just published this fall) and of* School Power, *an earlier book documenting his work in New Haven.*

HEL: Your school development program has helped schools in New Haven attain dramatic turnarounds. What is your approach to school change?

JC: It is the coming together, first of all, of the key stakeholders in the educational process that is important. The principal, teachers, support staff, parents—are all represented in a governance and management group. Their commitment to working cooperatively makes a real difference—it allows the children to grow, decreases the behavior problems, and gives you the opportunity to focus on the academic program.

The group has to operate by certain guidelines. For example, you need a no-fault policy. You don't blame the parents, teachers, administrators, or kids. You focus on understanding and solving the problem, rather than on finding out who is at fault. And decision is by consensus rather than majority rule. In that way you avoid winner-loser behavior.

There are also two other mechanisms that are part of our model—a parents' group and a mental health group consisting of social workers, psychologists, special education teachers, and other support staff. Representatives from each of these groups serve on the management team to ensure that it is child-sensitive and relationship-sensitive.

HEL: What are the functions of the governance and management group?

JC: This group develops a comprehensive school plan with a focus on creating a climate that will facilitate the social and academic growth of young people. Our approach is not a set of techniques or a particular set of activities. Members of the team sit together and determine what to do to address the issues they identify and achieve the outcomes they want.

For example, in a Prince George's County (Maryland) school the emphasis is on the lunchroom, because that's where there have been problems. The goal is to get the lunch staff to feel like a part of the school. In Benton Harbor (Michigan), a team is working on getting the kids out into the community in order to give them experiences that will support their social skills.

HEL: What might we see if we were to visit one of these schools?

JC: What you see, generally, is relaxed schools, with kids who walk down the halls in friendly, secure ways, and staff who can interact with children easily. For example, last fall a teacher in one of the schools described an incident in which a child was making noise and running in the hall. This teacher looked around and saw three other teachers come to their doors.

In the past, the teachers wouldn't have bothered, because they felt they couldn't affect anything in the system. If a teacher did say "You shouldn't do that," the child was likely to say "You're not my teacher!" But this time, when the teachers reminded the child not to run, the child accepted it. The point is that the children feel cared about; people in the school respond to their needs, and help socialize them. The teachers feel empowered because they can make things happen. It's a very different climate.

HEL: Could you explain how working on the kinds of climate issues and social skills you've been describing is related to academic improvement?

JC: Learning isn't a mechanical process. Motivation and commitment to learning don't happen just by having somebody stand up and try

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to pump information into you. You have to work on making the school a place where people connect emotionally. If you can't do that, then you're not going to succeed.

When we first went into the New Haven schools we observed the difficult interactions between home and school. Parents had no faith in the school. They had this hope in September that the school would make a difference for their kids. But by October they knew that it wouldn't.

All of the potential animosity between home and school came out as the kids didn't do well in school. Parents were angry that the school only wanted to see them when their kids were in trouble. Racial issues, class issues, low expectations—all became manifest in a variety of ways because of the disappointment and frustration that developed on the part of parents and staff.

Parents were angry that the school only wanted to see them when their kids were in trouble.

Eventually we viewed the problem this way: on the one side you have parents whose attitudes, values, and experiences are consistent with their social network. On the other, you have a school with expectations the kids can't necessarily meet, given their experiences. Now, you get a clash as a result of that, a clash that staff is not prepared to deal with. It's not their fault, but they aren't prepared. And so teachers respond by punishing the kids, or lowering their expectations.

HEL: How do you prevent this downward spiral from occurring?

JC: You want the school people to understand that the children are not bad or dumb. They just haven't had certain kinds of experiences. They can meet the expectations of the playground and the housing project, but they can't meet the expectations of the school until you show them how.

At the same time, you have to work on helping parents see that thinking and acting in certain ways will pay off for their kids. When you ask low-income kids to achieve in schools, you're often asking them to be different from their parents. Most are not going to do that, because their family is the only certain source of their self-affirmation. So it's important for the parents to let their kids know that they support the directions in which the school is trying to help them move.

HEL: Specifically, how do you build the links between home and school?

JC: You try to realign the relationships through activities that bring everybody together in a cooperative way. The governance and management team make a calendar in which they take all of the things that schools often do—like a welcome back pot-luck supper, or a Halloween parade—but they make these part of an overall social program with the clear goals of creating a good relationship climate and giving kids necessary social skills.

People begin to trust one another, develop mutual respect, and know one another as people with common cause. The kids see that their parents and teachers aren't enemies; in fact they begin to view their teachers as extensions of their parents.

HEL: Many schools try to have these kinds of activities, but find it difficult to get parents to attend. What would you suggest?

JC: There is always a small group of parents that presents itself. You get those parents involved in looking at what needs to be done in the school—something that rarely happens. When parents are involved in planning, they have a stake in the plan; they want it to succeed. It becomes everybody's mission or activity, not something that school people impose on parents.

In addition, by involving parents in the social climate, you create the trust that allows more parents to come in. Low-income parents are often people who didn't do well in school themselves and have bad memories of schools. You create activities that allow them to come in during good times—not just bad times. And you avoid overexposing their weaknesses. They get to know the staff as people and develop the kind of confidence and courage that allows them to do lots of other things, both in the school and outside.

Gradually you can figure out ways to increase your numbers even more. For example, you can take money you raised from putting on a social event and pay for babysitters who will take care of kids during the next event so that even more parents can attend. If you try offering babysitting before you have trust, nobody comes anyway.

Kids need to be able to say, "My mother would kill me if I did that." It lets them off the hook with their peers.

HEL: Can you tell us more about the functions of the mental health team?

JC: In most schools the social workers, psychologists, and special education teachers focus on individual children, and rarely even talk to one another, except perhaps at a placement meeting. You can have situations where a child is being pulled out of class to see as many as seven different helpers.

When we consult with school districts we train their mental health people to work as a team that focuses on prevention as well as treatment. The team looks at the system for procedures and activities that create problems for children. For example, if several children referred as behavior problems are recent transfers into the school, then there might be some new kind of orientation that would help.

HEL: I understand that you have expanded your program into middle and high schools. Have you found the need to modify the model?

JC: We parents may want to believe that our older kids don't want

us around. We're in such a difficult relationship with them that we'd just as soon have the school people take care of them. But the kids don't want you to go away. In this day and age, with the many decisions they have to make, teenagers need parents more than ever. They say "I don't need you. Leave me alone." But what they mean is "Just back off a little bit. Keep your eye on me, but don't be so visible."

Kids need to be able to say "My mother would kill me if I did that." It lets them off the hook with their peers, so they don't have to engage in destructive behavior. It's also important to be around so that they can raise questions with you, rather than with peers who know less than they know.

In terms of a parent program, basically the same principles exist. You just have the activities at a developmental level that is consistent with the kids. In the middle and high school you want to engage the kids more in community service, in part-time jobs that are designed to expose them to the world of work, and in activities that allow them to see the relationship of academic learning to social performance and earning a living. So community agencies become more important with adolescents.

HEL: How do you go about spreading your school-development model?

JC: Other districts send a person to spend up to a month with us learning in detail how our model works. In addition, about thirty people from the district—from parents to superintendent—come for two and a half days. They can come on two, three different occasions, depending on how they want to do it. They listen to me go over the theory. They talk with parents and teachers and administrators. They go into the schools. They go back with knowledge of the model and evidence that it has been successful. They are then ready to support the program in their own district.

For further information: James P. Comer, Yale Child Study Center, P.O. Box 3333, New Haven, CT 06510.

Unpopular Children

Jeannie is 9. She talks loudly over the voices of the other fourth-grade girls. Sometimes, out on the playground, she hits hard to get what she wants. Although her classmates may give way, later on they complain about Jeannie, how bossy she is and how much they hate her.

Michael, 12, is a little older than many of his classmates, and not doing well in school. Maybe by keeping his sixth-grade class in an uproar he is trying to ensure that others won't do well either. In class a few boys sometimes get caught up in his disruptive games; mostly, though, other kids shun Michael. Out on the playground, he plays "Star Wars" alone.

Although **David** makes no trouble in his fifth-grade class, he isn't any better liked than Michael or Jeannie. He has always seemed hesitant and maladroit; now that he is 11, he is always alone. No one chooses him as a partner for class projects, and his classmates groan if he's assigned to their side for team games. His teachers find him cooperative, but peers have no use for him.

If you ask school children how much they enjoy being with each of their classmates, you will find some names at the bottom of nearly everybody's list. Psychologist Robert Selman of Harvard identifies several behaviors as particularly likely to be the source of such unpopularity. Some children, like David, are "so shy and withdrawn that they become isolated or victims"; others, like Jeannie or Michael, are "kids who are disruptive, who strike out physically or bully others."

According to Selman, children use relationships with peers to refine their abilities to share, to handle anger, and to sustain emotional closeness. "Our research shows very clearly," he states, "that the cutting edge of children's growth in reciprocity isn't with adults, it's with equals." If children go through day after day without making friends, they become increasingly vulnerable to life-long difficulties. Chronic peer rejection is linked with childhood depression, low self-esteem, early school-leaving, and delinquent behavior.

The Risks of Waiting

For teachers, the issue is not just how to help a rejected child, but how to handle the complex classroom dynamics that occur as other children express their negative or ambivalent feelings about a classmate. Peer relations are an important part of the climate of classrooms and schools. But it is not always clear whether, or how, to intervene.

Can children work things out on their own? Will a different peer group respond more positively to a rejected child? Will children who are unpopular necessarily remain so? Time and group composition make a difference for some children. Researchers point to children who are isolated in school but are able to make at least one friend in another group—a neighborhood gang, a church club, or a local sports team. Researchers also estimate that about half of those whom classmates reject in the early grades eventually find a degree of acceptance.

However, children like Jeannie, Michael, and David may wind up isolated in any peer group. When they

enter new situations, they often bring along the patterns for their own defeat. Their aggression or withdrawal makes them unattractive to other children, who tend to avoid or reject them. In response, they behave in ways that make them even more unlikable and less able to engage in the rough-and-tumble exchanges through which children learn to negotiate and compromise.

Although such a cycle may begin as early as age one or two, it may not be noticeable until the first few years of school. As an overly aggressive toddler grabbing for a truck in the sandbox, Jeannie may not have looked all that different from her peers. By second grade, however, this kind of physical aggression isolates her from the group. For children like David, it may take even longer—until third or fourth grade—for their withdrawal to look odd.

The problem is that waiting until the problems are clearly evident carries serious risks. By then, children may have entered what John Coie of Duke University describes as the "maintenance" phase of rejection. As Coie states: "The peer group changes its behavior toward them, and rejected children change in their behavior toward peers, in their feelings about themselves, and in the thoughts and expectations they have about themselves and others."

Complex Dynamics

For more than a decade, psychologists have experimented with ways of helping unpopular children alter their behavior. Most of these studies have involved physically aggressive boys—a group whose behaviors are both easy to identify and problematic in the classroom (see "Bullies and Their Victims," HEL, November 1987).

Theorizing that unpopularity was essentially a problem of deficits in specific skills, researchers in the mid-1970s tried tutoring rejected children in positive play skills. While early results were promising, the research did not resolve such key questions as whether unpopular children would transfer their new skills to other situations or would maintain new levels of peer acceptance.

Today, many psychologists believe that the dynamics of early peer rejection are too complex for effective one-shot interventions. A child like Jeannie may have an obvious problem, such as an inability or unwillingness to share toys. But training her to share with other children will probably not change her behavior for long, if her other problems are not addressed.

Chronic peer rejection is linked with childhood depression, low self-esteem, early school leaving, and delinquent behavior.

For example, Jeannie may misconstrue people's motives, so that she perceives actions taken around her as threats aimed at her. She may also have difficulty controlling her impulses. Seeing a threat and striking out may occur in such rapid succession that she never experiences an interval for reevaluation. Furthermore, Jeannie may be reluctant to tone down her aggressiveness if at home this behavior gets her needs attended to more effectively than other strategies.

Current research efforts are aimed at finding the right combination of interventions to alter what are now seen as complex patterns of motivation, action, and reaction. Coie and several colleagues at Duke, for example, are trying out a program in which they not only teach aggressive third graders positive play skills but also try to affect three other aspects of their social skills: the way these children misread or fail to notice social cues on entering a group, their inability to generate solutions to conflicts, and their low tolerance for negative emotions.

A Bad Reputation

In a 1986 study, Karen Linn Bierman, Cindy L. Miller, and Sally D. Stabb of Pennsylvania State University compared several methods for changing the behavior and social status of aggressive, rejected boys in grades one through three. The researchers found a combination of three approaches to be most effective: they coached the children in play skills, involved them in play sessions with one or more peers, and established a reward system that stopped paying off whenever negative behavior (yelling, acting mean, whining, fighting) reappeared.

Positive changes in a child's behavior, however, did not guarantee acceptance from peers. The boys seemed to gain status in the eyes of their peers immediately after the intervention. A few weeks later, even though the researchers observed continued improvements in the boys' behavior among peers, only their assigned play partners gave them credit for having improved.

In studies of how reputation affects the status of rejected children, Shelly Hymel of the University of Waterloo confirms that children —especially younger ones—treat social judgments as set in stone. This reputational barrier severely limits the benefits of short-term skill-enhancing programs. "Group process really matters," Hymel warns. "Even when a child improves his behavior you are sending him back to where he's disliked and rejected. In some cases the situation is now worse, because no matter what the child does, other children are likely to continue to interpret it in a negative light."

Improvising Solutions

While new experiments continue to reveal more about why some children are rejected and how they might be helped, thus far the research has not resulted in systematic guidelines for schools. At this point, most teachers have no choice but to use their own judgment and improvise solutions.

Seeing children interact in both play and work situations every day,

teachers are in a position to notice if one child becomes isolated and to ask why. Is there an academic or learning problem? Are there problematic social behaviors, either on the part of this child, or directed toward this child by peers? What is going on with this child at home? Without overreacting, it is important to move quickly to help children improve negative behavior patterns before group rejection becomes an established fact and the possibilities for social integration are cut off.

A recent study of teacher strategies for coping with problem children finds a positive relationship between the confidence teachers have in their ability to deal with hostile or aggressive behavior and their success in doing so. In a study for Michigan State University's Institute for Research on Teaching, Jere Brophy and Mary Rohrkemper compared teachers nominated by principals as "outstanding" in handling problem students with those seen as "average," by evaluating their responses to several vignettes depicting aggressive behavior in school.

They found that the higher-rated teachers combine firm limit-setting with a willingness to help aggressive students learn to cope with frustration and resolve conflicts. While clearly proscribing aggressive behavior, these teachers also develop personal relationships with troubled students and do not give up on them or treat them as social outcasts who should be isolated from the group.

Prevention

Could schools avoid the need to respond to hostile behavior or bad classroom dynamics by teaching all children social skills and strategies for getting along better? An increasing number of educators and psychologists believe that schools could and should take a more preventive approach.

In New Haven, Roger Weissberg of Yale University is testing a "social competence curriculum" for middle-school students. Children learn a series of mental steps to follow in an anger- or fear-arousing situation (for example, "look for signs of upset feelings"; "say what the problem is"; "decide on your goal"; "think of lots of solutions"). With the help of their teachers, they apply these steps to age-specific dilemmas, and, Weissberg emphasizes, to instances of unfairness or conflict that may arise in the classroom.

A curricular approach of this sort, however promising, is unlikely to garner widespread support until a clear link is established between changes in the way students *think* about behavior and changes in their *actual* behavior. Even then, such curricula will have to compete with the rest of the school's academic program for instructional time.

Children treat social judgments as set in stone.

The Children's Interpersonal Negotiation Strategies Project at Harvard, under the direction of Robert Selman, has taken a somewhat different approach to prevention. Incorporating aspects of the "stop and think" curricular approach, Selman and his colleagues have developed a ten-week training program that takes place outside the regular classroom. Counselors and other support staff work with pairs of children (matched for the differences in their problem-solving styles). The pairs have structured opportunities to play together and to practice the problem-solving steps they have learned, and then to reflect on how they have handled conflicts in their play. The sequence ends with the pairs working collaboratively on a project.

In addition to adopting special training programs or curricula that promote social development, schools are finding a variety of other ways to mitigate the competitive atmosphere and allow children to work cooperatively. Researchers and teachers have found such approaches as cooperative learning (*HEL*, September 1986), cross-age tutoring (*HEL*, March 1987), and mediation programs (see "Talking It Out: Students Mediate Disputes," *HEL*, January/February 1989) to bring about positive changes in the climate of school and classroom.

It is important to note that such "whole school" approaches to promoting social competence will not eliminate the need to offer special attention and help to particularly aggressive or withdrawn children. But such preventive programs could help create an environment in which rejection is less likely, and in which the children's own attempts to change are recognized and supported by peers and teachers alike.

For Further Information

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Kindergarten: Producing Early Failure?

In a popular children's book first published in 1978, *The Berenstain Bears Go to School*, Sister Bear is worried about starting kindergarten. Mama arranges to take her in to meet the teacher and see the classroom, which is filled with toys and art supplies. Sister feels a bit shaky going off on the school bus the first day, but is soon bringing home beautiful drawings and looking forward to school.

If Sister Bear were entering school in 1989, the story would require substantial revisions. She might not be eligible for kindergarten, even though she is the age Brother Bear was when he started three years ago. Or Mama herself might decide to give Sister another year to mature. As for a visit to school—the purpose would probably be a readiness test.

Kindergarten is changing. In most communities it is no longer a part-time, play-oriented introduction to school. It is "real" school. Children go for the whole day and spend a significant proportion of their time in academic pursuits. In an attempt to ensure children's success, school boards have instituted policies like those described above—raising the entry age, giving readiness tests, and setting up extra-year programs for those who appear "unready." Such changes, however, are not necessarily in the best interests of children.

Is Older Better?

The popular wisdom among parents and teachers today is that older children will be more successful in kindergarten. Many districts now require that entering children be 5 by September 1; some are even moving to summer cutoffs. And an increasing number of families, particularly those with the resources to pay for private care, voluntarily delay their children's entrance to school.

Studies conducted over the past 40 years confirm that younger children are more likely to encounter early school difficulties. However, in a recent review of this research, Lorrie Shepard of the University of Colorado and Mary Lee Smith of Arizona State University conclude that the detriment of being youngest in a grade is slight and disappears by third grade if instruction is individualized. As the researchers point out, whatever the cutoff date, some children will be up to a year younger than others and hence at a relative disadvantage—especially if the academic demands of kindergarten continue to escalate to reflect the presumed capabilities of an older average age-group.

The thrust of public policy should be to invest in young children, particularly poor children, who have the most to gain from early educational opportunities. In raising the entrance age, districts delay access to school to many children whose families simply cannot afford other arrangements. Keeping these children out of school decreases their access to health services as well (see "Detecting Disabilities Early," *HEL*, March 1989).

Where a district leaves the decision up to families, kindergartens are likely to become a mixture of older middle-class children and younger poorer ones. This skewed composition is not good for either group of children, and probably ensures an early and continuing achievement gap along race and social-class lines.

Readiness Tests

In addition to age, many districts now consider a child's score on readiness tests in determining who needs extra time or a special program. This is occurring despite a consensus among early childhood educators and testing experts that these tests *should not* be used in this way.

According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), readiness tests are as likely to result in misplacement as in correct placement. The error rate of tests commonly in use ranges from 33 to 50 percent. This is not surprising, given how inexperienced young children are at taking tests, and how quickly they develop and change.

Perhaps the greatest problem is that tests designed for one purpose are being used for another. For example, a number of widely used tests assess children's mastery of a specific set of skills. To assume that such tests give a clear picture of a child's future performance is highly questionable, notes testing expert Samuel Meisels. Yet districts use these tests in making decisions on promotion and placement.

Many districts use the Gesell School Readiness Test, precisely because its developers state that it can identify children who are not ready to begin school or to move to the next grade. Rather than a score, the child gets a "developmental age," based on a comparison of her performance on a set of tasks with age-based norms. The problem is that the claims of the testmakers have never been empirically verified. In fact, researchers raise serious doubts about the Gesell's accuracy. Furthermore, given the variability of individual development, setting age-based norms may be neither valid nor desirable.

The current reliance on readiness tests can be challenged on legal and ethical grounds as well. Children are removed from their normal peer group and placed in special programs without the due process guarantees of special education—without, for example, a comprehensive diagnostic evaluation leading to an individualized education plan approved by parents. This point was part of a successful legal challenge to prekindergarten testing in upstate New York.

The use of readiness tests also raises concerns about equity, insofar as they disproportionately identify minority and poor children as being "unready." Shepard and Smith note that the Gesell test will produce very much the same result as screening by

means of IQ tests, a practice that has been successfully challenged for leading to inequitable and discriminatory placement decisions.

Extra-Year Programs

Ultimately, the way a school district determines readiness is less important than whether children benefit from the resulting placements. At this point, the evidence does not support the trend toward more retention and special transitional classes for young children.

In their study of a Colorado district where promotion policy was left to the individual school, Shepard and Smith compared 40 children who spent an extra year after kindergarten with 40 control children, matched by age, sex, and readiness-test scores. They found that when both groups had completed first grade, the extra-year children were only one month ahead on a standardized reading test. There were no differences between the two groups on the math test or on teacher ratings of academic achievement, maturity, self-concept, or attention.

Such results do not seem to justify an additional year of school, especially since children who are overage for their grade eventually become more prone to drop out of school. The researchers also found indications of an immediate emotional cost. Parents reported these children to have somewhat worse attitudes toward school. Even when people were careful to avoid pejorative terms in referring to the extra year, some children concluded that they had failed.

The findings from one small-scale study do not constitute proof that current policy is wrong. But it is important to note that these results are consistent with earlier studies, including research conducted in a largely black urban district and a longitudinal study of students in a suburban middle-class district. In both cases, gains in achievement associated with such programs were ephemeral.

Academic Pressure

The majority of children entering kindergarten may not be directly affected by the types of policies described here. They are old enough, score well on the prekindergarten readiness test, and then go on to perform adequately in class. This does not mean, however, that most will escape the negative consequences of these trends.

Kindergarten has become a skill-based, academically oriented program. Two-thirds of the teachers interviewed in a recent study of Ohio kindergartens said that what they do each day is in direct conflict with their beliefs about what young children need. Teachers seem to feel they have little choice but to step up formal instruction. Some point to pressure from parents as a factor. More systemic and unremitting, however, are the pressures to prepare children for standardized achievement tests or other equally rigid performance objectives.

The error rates of readiness tests range from 33 to 50 percent.

Recently, the legislature in Mississippi agreed to stop the yearly testing of kindergarten children after hearing reports that teachers had moved toward formal instruction and skill drills. The test had, in effect, replaced the state guidelines, which called for active learning through exploration and play. A similar challenge in North Carolina resulted in the elimination of standardized tests for first and second graders.

Meanwhile, the use of standardized tests at the local level continues to expand. Even if the testing does not occur until second or third grade, the skills required by the test translate into relatively fixed standards at each previous grade level. "Children will learn to recognize and write the alphabet, upper and lower case; children will learn to count to 20."

First-grade teachers feel particularly accountable—it is their job to guide students through the crucial first stages of literacy. They also feel vulnerable, because they must accomplish this with 25 or more students, differing in age, background, maturity, and skills. The message to kindergarten teachers is clear: send us children who will measure up.

To investigate how this admonition affects the curriculum, Dolores Durkin of the University of Illinois recently studied reading activities in 42 kindergartens in Illinois. She found that the curriculum consisted mainly of whole-class instruction during which teachers relied on commercial materials, especially the beginning or "readiness" workbooks in the basal reader series children would encounter in first grade.

Observers found a remarkably similar pattern over different schools and districts. Children used the workbooks daily, according to a preestablished schedule, usually learning one letter and sound per week. Only rarely was this instruction placed in the context of recognizing whole words. Although at other times teachers read books aloud and attended to word meanings, the workbook-based segment constituted the core of reading instruction.

Ironically, most of these same districts enthusiastically endorsed developmental tests to identify differences among entering kindergarteners. But this endorsement did not result in varied instructional methods. Rather, teachers assumed that all the children could learn in one way, using one set of materials, and that those who didn't probably needed a transitional program before entering first grade.

Making Kindergartens Ready

The operating assumption in many schools is that the child must be made ready for the curriculum. Experts in early childhood education hold a very different view. A recent NAEYC research monograph poses a pointed question: Are

our kindergartens ready for the children? Current practices, states the report, ignore what nearly 100 years of expert practice and research have taught us about how children learn best.

Both NAEYC and the Task Force on Early Education of the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) call for kindergartens that can accommodate a wide range of individual differences. Children choose among activities the teacher has prepared or ones they themselves initiate; more time is spent in small groups or individually than as a whole class; reading and math are integrated into hands-on projects like baking cookies, putting on puppet shows, or even investigating how the heating system of the school works.

The kindergarten experience should be intellectually stimulating rather than academically demanding, explains Lilian Katz, director of the Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education at the University of Illinois. Just because children can learn certain skills in a rote fashion does not mean they should. The frequent drill and practice it takes to instruct young children in reading skills, cautions Katz, may result in short-term gain, but eventually can damage or destroy a child's disposition to read. Furthermore, drills take time away from exploratory and experiential learning and may interfere with social and emotional development.

Interestingly, it is not only staunch advocates of a developmental or whole-child approach who object to the current reliance on basal readiness books and worksheets. In a recent article in the *Elementary School Journal*, Russell Gersten and two colleagues present evidence that low-income children gain from an academic kindergarten, but take pains to explain that they are *not* talking about instruction based on readiness workbooks.

The researchers contrast the frustration and confusion children experience from trying to learn new letters and sounds from workbooks with the direct-instruction model adopted by some Follow Through programs in the 1970s. In this model, small groups of children work intensively with a teacher or an aide on reading, math, and language skills. Lessons last half an hour at most, during which the teacher leads children through six or seven brief sequences, interweaving games and role-playing with more formal instruction. The emphasis is on interaction, with frequent practice and review.

What teachers do each day is in direct conflict with their beliefs about what children need.

This curriculum, argue Gersten and his colleagues, emphasizes high levels of student interest and motivation. They point to the continued academic success, six years later, of children who participated in a K–3 direct-instruction program in East St. Louis.

If current trends continue, most kindergartens will resemble neither Katz's nor Gersten's ideals. In fact, the kindergarten Katz describes may become virtually extinct. Ironically, because of the paucity of research comparing different kindergarten curricula, studies of the direct-instruction model are sometimes cited as support for the very type of workbook-oriented instruction that Gersten criticizes. This is a misuse of the research. There is no direct evidence that the type of instruction found in many kindergartens today will produce long-term gains in achievement.

What Next?

In their Colorado study, Shepard and Smith found some schools where no one "flunked" kindergarten. Teachers and principals shared a commitment to adapting curriculum and instruction to a relatively wide range of differences among children. These schools had goals for skill development, but the teachers had made flexible between-grade arrangements so that students could continue to work toward these goals over several years. Other features included supplementary services such as tutoring, summer learning opportunities, parent-education programs, and guidance services.

How can parents and educators encourage their own schools to reflect the best interests of young children? We suggest several immediate steps:

1. *Monitor the effects of "readiness" policies.* Many teachers support such policies, pointing to the progress of particular children during their extra year. This evidence, however, is incomplete. It is important at both school and district levels to seek answers to questions like these:

Are parental decisions to delay their child's entry into school resulting in a stratification of kindergarten classes along age and social-class lines?

Are multiple forms of assessment (including interviews with parents) used in making placement decisions? If readiness tests are used, has their accuracy in predicting future success been verified?

How is retention or special placement affecting children's performance and attitudes toward school—not just in the first year, but in the years that follow? Are certain groups of children affected more than others?

2. *Create opportunities for teachers to enhance their knowledge of child development and early childhood education.* Some primary-grade teachers have a strong background in these areas, but many teachers and principals do not. Since the kindergarten is strongly influenced by the overall culture of the school, it is critical that everyone involved in creating that culture have a clear understanding of the particular needs of young children. Principals and district administrators should arrange for early childhood specialists to lead all-school workshops or discussion groups.

3. *Create a group of professionals*

and parents who can speak on behalf of children aged 4–8. At this point most schools have no institutional way to take the unique needs of young children into account. The NASBE Task Force on Early Childhood Education recommends the establishment of a new organizational structure—an early childhood unit—in all elementary schools. The point is to create a forum in which every aspect of schooling—space, materials, assessment, grouping, curricular standards, and staffing—can be evaluated and redesigned in light of the distinctive characteristics of young learners.

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Reading Problems: Is Quick Recovery Possible?

Susie peers closely at the book. "The clown got on," she reads, "and then the bus got on." "Does that make sense?" prompts the teacher. "Try it again." Confused, Susie looks at the page. Why was her guess wrong? Isn't "b" for bus? And she remembers seeing a picture of a big yellow bus.

Susie, like many beginning readers, knows the sounds associated with some consonants, and sometimes remembers to use this information to guess at unfamiliar words. Often she seems hardly to attend to the print at all, inventing the text from her familiarity with the story or from her sense of how people talk. When reminded to "read what's on the page," she looks so intently for individual letters or words she might recognize that she loses her own sense of language and meaning. Susie has begun to have "reading problems."

What should a school do for a child like Susie? Her difficulties may be evident as early as the beginning of first grade. Perhaps with time she will make a "literacy breakthrough," but waiting has its risks. If Susie's struggles continue for too long she will lose confidence in herself as a reader and become so frustrated and confused that she cannot profit from classroom instruction. By the time she receives remedial or special education services (most likely not until third or fourth grade), she may already be far behind her classmates.

Reading Recovery

Many teachers and parents assume that if early instruction is good enough, failure can be prevented. But, regardless of the approach used, some children get off to a poor start in reading. The dilemma is how to respond quickly to such early problems, before a pattern of failure is established.

Reading Recovery, a short-term intervention program developed by the New Zealand psychologist Marie Clay, is designed to help such children *before* school problems develop. Children who show evidence of early difficulties with reading (the lowest 10 to 20 percent of their class) work one-on-one with a specially trained teacher for half an hour each day. The goal is to bring these children up to the average reading level in their class within twelve to sixteen weeks, so that they can profit from classroom instruction and continue to improve in reading without extra help.

First introduced into the Columbus, Ohio, schools in 1984–85, as a small-scale collaborative venture with Ohio State University, Reading Recovery is now being used in 228 of the state's school districts, with the full endorsement of the state department of education and the legislature. Eventually the program will reach approximately 15 percent of all first graders in Ohio.

Part of the explanation for this unusual level of support can be found in the positive results recorded by Gay Su Pinnell, Diane DeFord, and Carol Lyons of Ohio State University. In a longitudinal study of the first group of 136 first graders enrolled in the program, the researchers found that most not only caught up with their classmates but were still keeping pace with them three years later. This finding indicates that Reading Recovery has an impressive potential to reduce the need for extra support services.

In the Columbus study, the lowest 20 percent of students in some classrooms were randomly assigned either to Reading Recovery or to a year-long remediation program. The Reading Recovery group (including those who had not successfully completed the program in the usual time span) scored higher than the comparison group on all measures of reading achievement. In addition, the researchers monitored results as the program expanded to include thousands of children across the state. Test scores indicate that the statewide effort has produced gains in reading ability comparable to those documented in the Columbus schools.

Orchestrating Cues

"Scholars with very different views of how children learn to read see the success of Reading Recovery as confirming their own theory," notes Pinnell. In a field that has become increasingly polarized—with experts arguing the value of basal readers versus children's literature, decoding skills versus reading for meaning—Reading Recovery does not fit any of the usual labels. Tailored to the needs of the individual child, the lessons may, for example, combine aspects of both a phonics-based and a whole-language approach.

Clay developed the Reading Recovery program after detailed observations of good readers in the early stages of learning to read. She found that they made use of a variety of cues (visual information, letter-sound relationships, sentence structure, oral language patterns, and story meaning), and could integrate these into the overall process of constructing meaning from text. Poor readers, while aware of some cues, did not know how to apply or build on this knowledge. They especially lacked key strategies such as predicting text from cues, self-monitoring, and self-correction.

In the half-hour lessons developed by Clay and her colleagues, a child engages intensively in both reading and writing, with the support and guidance of a teacher. The child begins by reading aloud, first several familiar stories and then a new book introduced the day before. Later in the session the child composes a short message (drawing either from one of the stories or from her own experience), writes the message with the aid of the teacher—who then copies it on heavy paper and cuts it up for the child to reassemble and read—and finally, examines and discusses with the teacher the new book that will be read in the next session.

Although the format is set, there are no packaged or commercially prepared materials. Rather, the teacher selects several appropriate books for each lesson, from hundreds of "little books" with appealing stories. In the writing segment the child controls the content, using her own language and sense of meaning. In helping the child spell the words and then reassemble the cut-up message, the teacher focuses attention on the details of written language, and especially on strategies for hearing sounds in words.

Teacher Training

Clearly, in such a program, much depends on the quality of the teacher's moment-to-moment interactions with the child. During their first year in the program, Reading Recovery teachers receive intensive training, supervision, and support. They attend a weekly seminar, which often involves a "through the glass" observation and discussion of a session in progress. The emphasis is on learning to conduct careful and systematic observations of children's reading and writing. In subsequent years, teachers continue to hone their skills in periodic meetings and workshops.

Even the poorest readers have understandings and skills they can draw on in approaching text.

The teacher leaders who conduct this on-site training have themselves completed a year-long, university-based program. (Currently, only Ohio State University trains teacher leaders for Reading Recovery, but programs will soon be available at New York University and the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois.) Teacher leaders then return to their districts to supervise and train other teachers. As Pinnell and her colleagues emphasize, this two-stage staff-development process requires a long-term commitment from the district.

The teacher leaders and teachers in the Reading Recovery program come from among the ranks of primary grade and remedial reading teachers already in the schools. In fact, they remain in their regular positions for half of each day, tutoring children during the other half. For example, two Reading Recovery teachers may share a first-grade classroom, carrying out their tutorials while their partner is with the class. Part of the district's commitment must thus be to allow creative patterns of staffing.

In terms of financial support, although Reading Recovery involves new expenses, most schools already commit resources to remedial help for beginning readers. To cover the costs of this program, districts in Ohio have drawn from such resources, as well as from Chapter I funds (when students meet the federal criteria for eligibility).

Key Features

Reading Recovery is only one approach to early intervention with poor readers. But a number of its special features suggest possibilities and directions that can be useful to those carrying out any early intervention, special education, or remedial programs.

- A class size of one. Many remedial and special programs involve small groups of children. While all may need help in reading, their problems may be quite different, making small-group instruction difficult and unproductive. A tutorial situation may be the most effective way to accelerate a child's learning to the point where she can benefit fully from regular class instruction.
- Starting from children's strengths. Remediation often involves a deficit model of instruction, in which the focus is on children's weakest areas of skill or knowledge. But even the poorest readers have understandings and skills they can draw on in approaching text. When they realize that what they already know has value in reading and writing, they gain confidence and are better able to try new strategies.
- Using reading and writing for mutual reinforcement. Instead of

correcting a child frequently during oral reading, a teacher can use writing activities as a time to call the child's attention to visual information and to reinforce decoding skills. Decoding may make more sense to a child when she is working from the sounds in words (words she has spoken) to the letters representing those sounds, rather than from letters to sounds.

• Teachers trained in both classroom and tutorial techniques. Those offering special or remedial help often have little experience in regular classrooms. Such experience might contribute to their understanding of the full range of children's strengths and weaknesses, and of the skills children need to thrive in the classroom setting. Furthermore, the training in observation and diagnosis that specialists receive can serve regular teachers well. Both principals and Reading Recovery teachers report positive changes in the teachers' approach to whole-class instruction as a result of their special training.

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Cooperative Learning: Making It Work

No longer just a topic for education journals, cooperative learning now appears in school-improvement plans and is even discussed on television talk shows. Whether the issue is racial and cultural diversity, mainstreaming of special education students, or how to develop critical thinking skills, cooperative learning is likely to be recommended. This approach has even found champions among political and business leaders, who emphasize how important it is for young people to learn the skills of teamwork before entering the workforce.

The basic idea is simple and differs profoundly from the typical teacher-centered format. In a cooperative classroom the teacher organizes the curriculum (or major parts of it) around tasks and projects that students carry out in small groups. The point is to create assignments and use grading and grouping procedures that give students a stake in one another's progress.

Proponents point to evidence, accumulated over nearly twenty years of research and practice, that cooperative learning works. David and Roger Johnson of the University of Minnesota and Robert Slavin of Johns Hopkins University have documented social, personal, and academic gains for learners of all ages. One central finding is that cooperative learning helps students become more accepting of classmates who are different. Also, researchers like Spencer Kagan of the University of California at Riverside have found evidence that black and Hispanic students learn particularly well in cooperative groups.

The work of bringing cooperative learning into our schools, however, moves slowly. Most educators have little experience with this approach. They were not taught this way themselves, nor did their professional training cover cooperative methods. And many teachers, while in favor of more cooperation in the classroom, doubt whether it will work at their grade level, for their subject matter, with their students.

There is evidence that black and Hispanic students learn particularly well in cooperative groups.

Is cooperative learning likely to disappear into the gap between research and tradition? Not necessarily. The challenges, while very real, may not be insurmountable. A first step is to name the obstacles and assess the strategies suggested by both research and practice.

Teaching Social Skills

Obstacle 1: Kids do not know how to be productive and responsible group members. Some see groupwork as a chance to fool around. The ones who do get involved may end up resentful that they did all the work.

Proponents of cooperative learning see this as an argument *for* rather than against groupwork. They argue that being able to work as part of a team and to address conflict constructively are probably among the most important skills students can learn in school. In a recent survey, college graduates singled out these sorts of skills as ones that they needed most in adult life, but that had been least developed by their schooling.

But students will not necessarily learn these skills just by being placed in groups. As one principal noted, successful groupwork involves "a lot more than putting four desks together and handing out worksheets." In an article entitled "Collaborative Learning and Other Disasters," Richard Whitworth describes how he learned the hard way that he could not simply "set up detailed tasks for the students and then stand back." Instead, he found himself "constantly on the move: monitoring the group's progress, offering advice...demonstrating how to behave as a contributing member of the group."

For groupwork to be beneficial, students must develop what Noreen Webb of the University of California identifies as "helping behaviors." Studying the dynamics of small groups, Webb found that the quality of interaction among group members determines whether they gain academically and socially. Specifically, she found gains in self-esteem and achievement when students offered one another explanations—not just answers—and when such help was given in response to specific requests.

This means, notes Webb, that teachers must be prepared to instruct students in behaviors such as how to ask for help (the art of asking open-ended questions), how to listen and probe, and how to give clear explanations that allow the listener to follow the thought process. She recommends a variety of ways to teach such skills—from modeling or demonstrating the desired behavior to having students role-play the behavior and critique one another's performance.

The Cooperative Link, the newsletter of the Cooperative Learning Center at the University of Minnesota, suggests that teachers assign specific roles to group members, a technique for encouraging what researchers call "positive interdependence." For example, one student becomes the "checker," who probes to see whether everyone can explain what the group has done. The "observer" records the group's activities, presenting his or her findings at the end of the time period ("I heard...," "I noticed..."). The "summarizer" keeps track of group decisions ("The main points are...").

By assigning such roles the teacher can distribute the work among members of the group. At the same time, students are forced to move out of their usual patterns. If, for example, a teacher casts the biggest talker as the observer, that student may realize how much better the group functions when no one member dominates.

Interdependence does not mean ignoring or discouraging conflict. As kids work together, arguments will occur about who is right or what the rules are. Such differences provide an opportunity to teach another crucial set of social skills—how to negotiate, consider solutions, and find workable compromises. While all of this takes time and practice, proponents describe immediate payoffs—in classroom climate and even in behavior on the playground—as students become more comfortable with their differences and better able to handle disagreements.

Modifying Ability Groups

Obstacle 2: Ability levels vary widely. Unless we group students by ability, an assignment that is challenging for some will be too easy for others.

Teachers often divide students into groups by ability level, giving different assignments to each group. But there is no persuasive evidence that this type of grouping benefits most students; in fact, some studies suggest that it may be detrimental, especially for those in low-ability groups (see *HEL*, July 1987).

As kids work together, arguments will occur about who is right or what the rules are.

Would heterogeneous grouping of students work better? In her studies of such groups, Webb found that high- and low-ability students benefited more than those in the middle. Students with a middle range of skills neither did much of the explaining nor were the ones who asked for help.

One solution, notes Webb, is to form groups with a narrower ability range—some groups of those with low to middle levels of skills, and some of those with middle to high levels. She also suggests paying attention to each child's profile of academic and social strengths in determining group composition, so as to try to give every child, at some time, the experience of being the most able member of a group.

Slavin and his colleagues have obtained promising results with a math curriculum called Team Accelerated Instruction (TAI), which uses both heterogeneous and homogeneous grouping. Students are members of home teams (which cross ability levels) and teaching teams (which consist of students at the same level). In their home teams, they explain problems to one another and check answers. Periodically, the teacher pulls together children who are at the same point in the curriculum to help them learn new concepts. They then return to their home teams to practice.

What Do They Learn?

Obstacle 3: Teaching students the social skills to be productive group members takes time—and this is time they are not using to learn the curriculum.

While most teachers believe social skills to be important, they do not want to sacrifice academic skills or content. But there is some evidence that the social aspects of groupwork may actually reinforce the academic ones. Studying pairs of fourth graders working at computers on a collaborative writing task, Colette Daiute of Harvard University found intriguing connections between how the children worked together and how a child's writing changed or improved.

Daiute analyzed each student's writing before and after the joint effort and then compared pairs of students in which both members became better writers with pairs in which neither did. She found that children in the improved pairs were more able to consider alternative wordings and to tolerate disagree-

ment. These pairs also showed what Daiute calls playfulness in dealing with the task, using each other's words and ideas to push themselves creatively.

But what about the later grades, when more subjects must be learned and more complex skills mastered? As one high school teacher put it, "Getting into college is a competitive, not a cooperative venture." Supporters of cooperative learning can point to a number of studies indicating gains in achievement associated with properly structured groupwork. When the structure combines group goals with individual accountability, middle and high school students show significantly greater gains than peers learning the same material in a more traditional mode.

Researchers at Johns Hopkins have incorporated both of these elements into TAI and Student Team Achievement Divisions (STAD). Team members are tested individually after helping one another learn material the teacher has presented. Everyone has a stake in how much teammates learn, because the team score is the sum of the individual scores—and these are based on how much a student has improved, not on his or her absolute level of skill or knowledge. Slavin has found that this kind of teamwork raises achievement test scores across a range of subjects, age groups, and ability levels.

Proponents emphasize that groupwork not only is a good way to cover factual material or teach lower-level skills but also fosters critical thinking and problem-solving. When students explain concepts to one another, they confront differences of opinion and become aware of various viewpoints. The challenge for educators is to devise structures that encourage this kind of interchange.

In "jigsawing," a technique developed by Elliot Aronson of the University of California at Santa Cruz, students help one another understand complex material. In an eleventh-grade English class studying Homer's *Odyssey*, for example, the teacher assigns the first half to the whole class and then creates groups in which each member studies a different portion of the remaining text. Students leave their assigned groups to meet with others reading the same material; they discuss themes, metaphors, and allusions and explore ways to present these to their groups. Back in the original groups, each leads a discussion of his or her section of the story. In the end, group members demonstrate their understanding of the whole work through a project such as designing a study guide.

David and Roger Johnson have developed a format for helping students learn to think about controversial issues. The teacher divides the class into groups of four and then into pairs. The members of a pair are assigned to do research on a particular topic and argue opposing points of view. Midway through the exercise they switch roles, and each has to argue the other side. Then all four students distill the controversy into a collectively written report.

This kind of collaboration does take time, so that the class may cover less material, especially when students are first learning the techniques. But the Johnsons argue that whatever is lost in quantity is more than made up for in quality. When students take on different sides of a controversy, they learn that there is not always a clear right answer and that defining a problem well can be as important as finding a solution.

Overcoming the Obstacles

No one suggests that cooperative learning is appropriate for everyone or at all times. But the evidence does indicate that students would benefit both socially and academically if this approach became a part of every teacher's repertoire. The point is not to replace the competitive and individualistic modes of learning, but to put cooperative strategies at least on an equal footing with them. The question is how to make this happen.

"Teachers can't just read about cooperative learning; they have to experience it themselves and then experiment with it in their classrooms over a period of several years," notes Roy Smith, a Boston-area teacher trainer who studied with the Johnsons. To begin this process, Smith suggests a combination of school-based workshops, peer support, and expert coaching. "A teacher can overcome the obstacles alone, but cooperative strategies are more likely to take hold when a critical mass of teachers from a particular school get involved."

Wayne Bark is proud to be the principal of a "cooperative school"—the Overlook Elementary School in Maryland, which serves as a laboratory setting for curricula being developed by researchers at Johns Hopkins. Changing the mode of teaching and learning did at first place a burden on teachers. But, Bark notes, cooperative methods now relieve some of the pressures teachers usually feel and ultimately make their work more satisfying: "No teacher can make it interesting for all children, all the time. Cooperative learning is a vehicle, a way that teachers can grow and students can work at the edge of their ability."

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What to Do about Homework

Homework at the elementary school level is fast becoming a "damned if you do, damned if you don't" situation. Certainly, giving students more work to take home is one visible way for teachers to respond to public demands for higher standards and more rigor. Many parents, students, and administrators expect homework to be assigned regularly, at least by the third grade.

But teachers receive complaints if they give too little, and complaints if they give too much or the assignment is too difficult. Similarly, parents worry when children say they don't have any homework, but may resent homework when it takes precedence over other activities or family needs.

Positive effects on achievement do not begin until the junior high school years.

Is sending work home a good idea in elementary school, especially in the younger grades? What purposes does it serve? Is it worth the time invested by teachers, students, and families? Harris Cooper of the University of Missouri has recently tackled such questions through a comprehensive review of the literature on homework, including more than 100 empirical studies. He concludes that homework does not begin to have positive effects on achievement until the junior high school years, and that its academic benefits double when students reach high school.

Boosting achievement, of course, is not the only reason for assigning homework. Other good reasons include developing children's initiative and responsibility and helping them see that learning can happen outside of school. But we know little about such effects; unfortunately, the research focuses narrowly on achievement (see "Homework," *HEL*, January 1985).

Cooper recommends that homework be tailored to serve different purposes at different grades. Since the effects on achievement are negligible for younger students, the goal should be to foster positive attitudes, habits, and character traits. Thus assignments should be short, make use of materials commonly found in the home, and give children success experiences.

At the junior high level, when homework begins to serve an academic function, students appear to benefit from working for one to two hours a night on material that is not too complex or unfamiliar. But, cautions Cooper, the role of homework in developing motivation should not be overlooked. He recommends that teachers combine mandatory and voluntary assignments, giving students intrinsically interesting projects or tasks to complete.

Such recommendations may prove difficult to carry out. In a recent study, Joyce Epstein of the Johns Hopkins Center for Research in Elementary and Middle Schools found a complex relationship among students' attitudes about homework and school, parents' level of education, and parent-child interactions in the family.

Children who behaved badly in the classroom and failed to complete their homework tended to be ones who did not like talking about school with their parents and felt tense when working with a parent. Furthermore, their parents were less educated and their homes less likely to be stocked with books, dictionaries, globes, or other materials that might be useful to them in completing assignments.

Yet children whose parents have low education levels and low incomes may derive important benefits from homework. In a study of 26 such families, Jean Chandler, Catherine Snow, and a team of researchers from Harvard University concluded that homework gave these parents a window on their children's schoolwork and sometimes led them to talk to the teacher. Since teachers surveyed in the study expected more of children whose parents sought them out, these contacts may have improved the children's chances for success at school.

The role of homework in developing motivation should not be overlooked.

Questions about how much and what kind of homework to give in the elementary and middle grades cannot be resolved by teachers alone. The need is great now, as it was when the *HEL* reviewed this topic five years ago, for parents, children, teachers, and principals to discuss the homework policies in their schools. The first step is to clarify the purposes of homework at each grade level, paying particular attention to whether assignments are having the desired effects on students' effort and motivation, as well as on communication between home and school.

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Is There Life after High School? Developing Apprenticeship in America

By Stephen F. Hamilton

Each year millions of American teenagers leave high school and enter a "floundering period" during which they move from one low-wage, low-skilled job to another. Could schools do a better job of smoothing the transition from school to work? Stephen F. Hamilton has studied the apprenticeship system in West Germany. The Harvard Education Letter *invited Hamilton to draw lessons from the German experience that might be applicable in America.*

By age 15 or 16, many American students consider school a waste of time. The complaints are familiar to parents and teachers: "It's boring." "We already had this in middle school." "Why do I need to learn this?"

Such comments and questions are particularly likely to come from students who are not planning to enter college—the "forgotten half," in the apt terminology of the William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work, Family and Citizenship. When teachers or parents tell them that getting a job or performing well in the workplace depends on doing well in school, these students are skeptical.

In the realities of today's youth labor market, it is difficult for teenagers to see any connection between school and work. Many are already working at jobs that demand few if any academic skills. When they graduate from high school they are likely to continue at the same kinds of jobs: as sales clerks, custodians, waitresses, shelf stockers.

Dropouts are more likely to be unemployed, but those who do find jobs often work alongside recent graduates. Even among the graduates of vocational programs, only 27 percent ever hold a job in the trade for which they trained.

For the most part, teenage workers are restricted to low-skill, low-wage jobs with little security and few possibilities for advancement. Many American employers seem to view teenagers as inherently irresponsible; they are reluctant to take the risk of hiring and training them.

Isolated from jobs that require academic learning, teenagers develop short-sighted priorities. They do not see that they might be candidates for better jobs in a few years—jobs that require reading, writing, math, problem-solving, and an ability to keep learning. By that time, those who failed to take school seriously may find themselves locked into low-level secondary-labor-market jobs for life, especially as high-paying factory jobs disappear.

Germany's Dual System

Can we find ways to demonstrate to young people that learning matters? Can we find ways to lay the groundwork for a lifetime of earning and learning? One answer may lie in developing a system of apprenticeship that will motivate youth to learn in school and will ease their transition into adult careers.

Apprenticeship is the largest form of upper-secondary education in West Germany.

Many Americans view apprenticeship as a pre-industrial approach to training, more appropriate to a craft-based economy. Today, apprenticeships in the United States enroll only a quarter of a million people each year (about 0.3 percent of the workforce), and more than half of these are in the construction trades. White males predominate, and the average age of an American apprentice is over 25.

In contrast, apprenticeship is the largest form of upper-secondary education in West Germany. More than 60 percent of West German 16- to 18-year-olds enroll in a "dual system" that combines apprenticeship with part-time vocational schooling. Comparable systems exist in East Germany, Austria, and the German-speaking cantons of Switzerland.

At the same age when their American peers leave high school to flounder in the youth labor market, German young people begin careers as cabinetmakers, bookkeepers, police officers, machinists, or TV repairers. Apprentices also learn such contemporary occupations as personnel officer, account executive, dental lab technician, legal aide, robot repairer, and aircraft mechanic. Many young women become apprentices, though a gender-conscious labor market offers them fewer and less attractive options.

Apprentices usually train for three years. They attend school one day each week and spend the remaining four days at their worksites, where adult workers participate in training them. Apprentices are paid for their work, but at a rate that recognizes their status as learners.

In large firms, apprentices take specialized classes during the workday. As they move through a series of placements in different divisions, regular employees serve as their mentors. An apprentice in a small shop ordinarily serves as a helper to one experienced worker for the entire training period, receiving instruction informally.

In school, apprentices take general courses in German and social studies plus specialized courses related to their occupation, usually incorporating aspects of math and science. Apprentice auto mechanics, for example, learn about the physics of automobile components and the calculations machinists make; manage-

rial apprentices study such subjects as accounting and business law.

In the past decade, West Germans have had to respond to the same economic competition and technological innovation that have impelled American business leaders to support school reform. As a result, apprenticeship is being upgraded as an educational experience, not just a method of job training.

One step in this direction is the consolidation of previously distinct training programs for related occupations. For example, 42 metalworking trades are now combined into 6 training occupations, all sharing a common initial core. Consolidation facilitates movement from one training program to another and assures that apprentices will be sufficiently grounded to master new technology as it appears.

Apprenticeship in West Germany is also now combined with an expanding range of schooling options. Some young people become apprentices after completing secondary schooling—college preparatory or vocational. Others enter postsecondary schools after finishing their apprenticeships. Such modifications open new avenues for future education and training.

No longer viewed as terminal training for a lifelong occupation, the dual system is becoming the foundation for lifelong learning in the workplace. The goal is to prepare workers to be adaptable, which, in turn, means giving priority to fundamental knowledge and skills, including such "higher-order thinking skills" as problem-solving.

Avoiding Rigid Tracks

The West German system is rooted in a particular culture, educational system, and labor market; we should not try to transplant it to this country. But we could invent our own form of apprenticeship, linking schools and workplaces by teaching some of the same knowledge and skills in both settings. This would simultaneously provide greater motivation for learning in school and a real alternative environment for learning.

In my view, an American system of apprenticeship should not be as narrowly focused on well-defined occupations as the West German system, or channel young people at such an early age into rigid occupational tracks. Our labor market is too volatile for that, and we value school credentials too much. Certainly we would not want a transitional institution for noncollege youth to erect new barriers against upward mobility.

At the same age when their American peers leave high school to flounder in the youth labor market, German young people begin careers as skilled workers.

However, in criticizing the tracking effects of apprenticeship, Americans should not overlook the comparable stratifying functions of ability groups in elementary schools, curriculum tracks in secondary schools, and the varying quality and prestige of colleges and universities.

We define our school system as democratic because it purportedly offers every young person a chance at higher education and a professional career. In fact, those who achieve less are taught to blame themselves and are too often left to flounder during and after high school. It is important to remember that in Germany those who do not go to college move directly into careers as skilled workers. And to be a skilled worker there is to have a valued identity and a respectable social status.

Several programs in the United States resemble West German apprenticeship but do avoid rigid channels. Cooperative education, in which students are placed in jobs that complement their studies, has a long and successful history. Currently, about 10 percent of U.S. vocational students are involved in recognized programs at the secondary level, mostly in retail trade. More are undoubtedly engaged in similar informal arrangements.

Another apprentice-like program is the Academy of Finance, initiated by Shearson Lehman Hutton (American Express) in New York City and now operating in more than a dozen cities with many corporate sponsors. The Academy enrolls high school juniors in special courses on business and finance and gives them summer jobs in the financial services industry. The clear connections between school and work have helped ordinary kids in inner-city schools set and achieve higher goals for themselves.

California's Peninsula Academies are three-year school-within-a-school programs. Each has a particular field (such as health care) around which students organize both their academic studies and their supervised work experience. Students take three academic classes and one technical class a day. Block scheduling allows for frequent field trips and visits to worksites and also a common planning time for academic and vocational teachers.

As these programs indicate, apprenticeship is a viable approach to improving educational achievement for a broad range of young people. The ones who may benefit the most are students who plan to enter the workforce right after high school, but apprenticeship programs also attract college-bound youth and serve them well.

Creating Our Own System

Pointing to domestic exemplary programs carries the risk of implying that nothing new is needed. But these programs are small and exceptional. We need a coherent system with a sequence of steps through which young people can move. Building on existing programs and practices, our communities could offer a range of opportunities such as these:

Exploratory apprenticeships. Community service work is especially appropriate for middle-grade youth who are not ready to make

vocational choices. Unlike the situation with traditional apprenticeship, there is no presumption that the student will continue in this line of work. And, unlike the usual teenage jobs, service programs may give young volunteers chances to plan projects themselves and to take on higher levels of responsibility.

School-based apprenticeships. In addition to the cooperative education programs and academies discussed above, some schools run their own enterprises, ranging from restaurants to daycare centers. School-based programs protect the young person's principal role as student and emphasize that the lessons to be learned are primarily general academic ones; job skills and occupational choice are less critical.

Work-based apprenticeships. A particularly promising form of work-based apprenticeship combines schooling with apprenticeship over a period spanning two years of high school and two years of technical college. Upon completion of such a "2 + 2" program, an apprentice has earned a high school diploma, an associate's degree, and qualification for employment as a technician, a promising occupational category with career potential.

New Partnerships

In many local areas, educators, employers, and civic leaders already meet to discuss how to improve the schools. Such groups can begin to work together to create a system that encompasses exploratory, school-based, and work-based apprenticeship.

The first step will be to take stock of opportunities already available for apprenticeship-like experiences. As gaps are identified, the planning group will design new combinations of schooling and work to address the needs of the "forgotten" young people in the community.

Clearly, this goes far beyond the agenda of the usual school-business partnership. Expanding apprenticeship will require changes in the ways both schools and workplaces deal with young people.

Schools, for example, must become more flexible. The idea that students can learn some things most effectively outside the classroom entails loosening rigid schedules and abandoning the practice of awarding credit primarily on the basis of hours spent in the classroom.

Shifting toward performance-based accreditation will enable students to master the same content via different combinations of study and work. It also will provide a means of assessing the quality of instruction in the workplace, a serious issue. School instruction may then also become more varied, with a mix of didactic classes, seminars, and tutorials.

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Employers and civic leaders must be firmly committed to supporting the use of workplaces and other community settings as learning environments. Public and private resources will be needed to cover the costs of integrating young worker-learners into business, industry, public, and nonprofit organizations. Training employees to be mentors and paying them for time spent teaching apprentices will not be the least of these costs.

A decade ago, the prospect of securing this level of investment by employers in the education of youth was hardly worth considering. Today, business leaders are prominent advocates of school reform. They are very concerned about the supply of adequately educated workers, and are aware that our competitors in international markets, notably West Germany and Japan, invest far more than we do in training young workers.

The question is whether employers can be convinced to bring educational reform into the workplace. Certainly they will not do so solely on the basis of altruism. They must be convinced that their contributions will be repaid in a more productive workforce. Furthermore, if only a few employers in the community commit resources to education, their competitors may be the ones to gain. A comprehensive apprenticeship system will have to involve many employers.

But, most important, cooperation must flow from agreement on the fundamental goals of education. The schools must serve the needs of a democracy for an educated citizenry, not just the needs of industry for prepared workers.

This is a promising moment for new forms of collaboration between schools and business precisely because new technology, new styles of management, and the growth of service employment are enlarging the common ground for employers' needs and the goals of democratic education. Many employers now describe their ideal employee in terms that fit the traditional well-educated person: someone who is able to communicate clearly, perform basic math, think critically, solve problems, work cooperatively, and behave responsibly.

By inventing an apprenticeship system whose primary purpose is general education, achieved by means of instruction and experience in school and workplace, we can more effectively educate youth who do not enroll in college. Ultimately, we can prepare them for employment, for further education, for citizenship, and for fuller, more satisfying lives as well.

For Further Information

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Stephen F. Hamilton is associate professor of Human Development and Family Studies at Cornell University. In 1984 he was a Fulbright Senior Research Fellow at the University of Munich, West Germany.

Girls at 11: An Interview with Carol Gilligan

Since the publication of her widely acclaimed book In a Different Voice *(1982), Carol Gilligan, a professor at Harvard University, has conducted and encouraged research on the development of girls. Her new project, "Strengthening Healthy Resistance and Courage in Preadolescent Girls," involves her in interviewing fourth- and sixth-grade girls in public and private schools, observing them in their classrooms, and participating with them in an afterschool club.*

HEL: Girls of 10 and 11 years old have the reputation of being somewhat bossy or recalcitrant. Is there any contradiction between this and the intriguing title of your new project?

CG: Girls at this age are sometimes called bossy. Based on our studies of development we prefer to think of them as astute observers of the human social world and stalwart resisters of outside pressure to relinquish their own perceptions and judgment.

They seem to carry around a kind of "field guide"—a naturalist's guide to human feelings—not summarized or abstracted, but detailed: how a person feels after this or that event; and of course sequences, narratives of relationships. If so-and-so does something to so-and-so, what happens.

My colleague Lyn Mikel Brown recently analyzed the narratives told by 7-to-16-year-old girls and discovered a key shift just around the age of 11. At this point, girls describe an internal struggle between what they value and what is "good" for them—as defined by their mothers, teachers, or others with greater experience and recognized authority.

In the face of this conflict, girls may begin to feel guilty about attending to their own needs and wants. But 11-year-old girls still value their experiences and knowledge. And they will speak out publicly. If a teacher misinterprets a sixth-grade girl's statement, the girl is likely to insist "That is not what I meant," rather than acquiesce or say "never mind."

HEL: So why does this resistance need strengthening?

CG: Sometime between the ages of 11 and 12, there is a change. I used to ask, "When responsibility to self and others conflicts, how should one choose?" Eleven-year-olds said, "Can you give me an example? That never happens." As one told me, "I am in all my relationships."

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Girls a year older would ponder at length over whether it was better to act in terms of yourself or the relationship. In other words, they had begun to separate "self" from relationship—to accept damaging conventions like defining care in terms of self-sacrifice.

In the face of these conventions, it's hard for girls to hold on to their own knowledge about caring and relationships. The clarity and outspokenness disappear. They equivocate, and sometimes even take desperate action to preserve a relationship or meet the expectations of others. They may, for example, risk pregnancy to please a boyfriend or ride in a car with a drunk driver rather than offend a friend.

HEL: What happens to their previous knowledge?

CG: By mid-adolescence, many girls come to question the validity of their own perceptions or feelings and, as a result, become deeply confused about what constitutes truth or trust in relationships. In a sense they withdraw their real selves from their relationships.

Adolescence poses a crisis of connection to a girl coming of age in this culture. What she can say is not what she deeply knows—except when she is in a carefully checked-out, private place. The dilemma is very real, and her solution—I think of it as brilliant, but highly costly—is to take that which she values most and remove it from the situation. It's an incredible price to pay. She loses her voice and connection with others. She is at risk psychologically, in danger of drowning or going underground.

HEL: Isn't adolescence a difficult stage for both boys and girls? Are adolescent girls more at risk?

CG: Adolescent boys come of age in a world "prepared" for them, or "like" them in a very real sense. Conventional norms and values strengthen male voices at adolescence. This is not as true for girls.

Lyn Brown has documented the ways girls struggle over whether to articulate their perceptions. They wonder: "Will I be taken seriously?" "Will I damage my relationships?" If girls resist the conventions, they must continually struggle to authorize their own voices with very little support from the social system or from institutions like the schools.

I think there may be a greater asymmetry than any of us have ever imagined between girls' and boys' development—in other words, a real difference. I do not mean one is better, and one is worse. To understand this you have to put away the usual assumption about child development—that there is a parallel, lockstep progression, with boys

and girls marching side by side, stage by stage, toward adulthood.

Adolescence, particularly early adolescence, may be a watershed in girls' development, comparable in some respects to early childhood for boys. There is evidence in the research literature for this theory. For example, Glen Elder and Avshalom Caspi studied families under stress—children of the Great Depression, and families during World War II—and found that the most vulnerable children were boys in early childhood and adolescent girls.

When boys experience psychological difficulties in adolescence, there's usually a history that goes back to childhood. Whereas girls tend to experience these difficulties for the first time in adolescence. They become depressed; by the age of 17 they feel significantly worse about themselves than boys do.

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HEL: What implications does this have for educators?

CG: The dilemma of girls' education tends to come to crisis in early adolescence. Girls are encouraged to give up their own experience and tune into the way other people want them to see things. They replace their detailed knowledge of the social world with an idealized, stereotyped notion of relationships and of the type of girl people admire. This nice or perfect girl isn't angry or selfish, and she certainly doesn't disagree in public.

At a faculty meeting in one school we studied, an experienced teacher said, "How can we help the girls to deal with disagreement in public when we can't do it ourselves?" The women then began to talk about how they discussed conflicts privately, on the telephone at night, in the bathroom after meetings—but not in public. Girls learn a lot about what is acceptable behavior for women from observing the adults around them.

HEL: It's interesting to think about the role of women teachers. Often girls' problems in high school have been talked about in terms of the insensitivity of male teachers.

CG: Relationships between girls and adult women may be particularly critical during the transition into adolescence. Preadolescents seek out and listen attentively to advice from women; they observe how we treat one another and how we negotiate relationships; they note inconsistencies and discrepancies, and they want to talk about them.

In our studies we have noted that girls often feel abandoned or betrayed by women: they see that mothers on whom they have relied for support can all but disappear in the world. They also become confused about the messages and behaviors of women teachers.

In one school where we did interviews, the younger girls—in the lower school—thought of their teachers as extremely knowledgeable. They could do such essential things as help children learn to read, and you could talk to them about important questions such as "If I have to choose someone for my team and I have two friends, how do I do it without losing a friend?"

But the upper-school teachers did not credit their lower-school colleagues with knowing a great deal. They talked about their colleagues as "nice," or "good with children"—the kinds of things people say about mothers and elementary school teachers. You could predict that girls would have trouble in the middle grades, because their passage to the culture of the upper school was going to involve a kind of betrayal.

HEL: Girls at this age can also betray or be mean to each other. Why are cliques so common?

CG: Last summer Annie Rogers and I started the "Strengthening Healthy Resistance" project with a writing, outings, and theater club. Every time we got on a bus, every time we walked, the most important question among the girls was who would be with whom. Everything else paled in intensity.

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One way to think about a clique is as an experiment in inclusion and exclusion, a way of gaining information about how it feels to be left out or taken in, and how it feels to include or exclude others. If you take relationships seriously, these are enormously weighty questions. Cliques are an awkward and often extremely painful way in which girls begin to deal with some of these questions.

I also think cliques are a dark mirroring of what girls see in relationships among women. It's not surprising that when cliques start to form, women freeze. We reexperience our own helplessness, and either tell girls they can't act this way or don't engage with them around the issue because it's just too painful. Our selective or ineffective response is part of a tacit agreement that this is how life among women goes.

HEL: Have you found ways to create a different kind of interaction?

CG: The project is premised on our belief that preadolescent girls can benefit from particular kinds of relationships with one another and with adult women. We believe that girls, in order to strengthen their capacities for resistance, courage, and creativity, have to learn to face fears of displeasing others, to feel the genuine risks that are an inevitable part of important relationships, and to sustain their disagreements.

The central activities of the club are journal writing, theater projects, field trips, and group discussion. We

want the girls to have opportunities to observe the world and to sort out discrepancies between what they see and what they believe they're supposed to think. The goal is to help them hold on to the veracity of their own perceptions and feelings, even in the face of contradictory norms, and thus to be in real rather than fraudulent relationships with themselves, with others, and with the world.

We also try to provide a safe place for them to explore disagreements. The group discussions become experiments for the girls in speaking publicly about what they know, in being honest with one another and with two adult women.

As the adults, we have to be willing to confront ourselves honestly as well: that is, to consider our own experiences and assumptions about being female in this society at this time and about what it means for women to foster the education and development of girls.

Why Kids Give Up on School—And What Teachers Can Do about It

Marvin walks into his third-period class, takes one look around, and puts his head down on his desk. He sits up briefly when the teacher rattles some papers near his ear and says "Marvin, your quiz." He glances at the quiz, crumples it up, and returns to his former posture. When his teacher insists he pay attention, Marvin counters with his evaluation of the class: "This is boring."

While political leaders set national goals for raising student achievement, teachers worry about the growing number of students like Marvin they must face every day. What would "high standards" or "high expectations" look like in my classroom, teachers wonder. And how can I translate such lofty goals into a better daily experience of teaching and learning?

Pressure and Boredom

A recent study of high school students and dropouts in Brooklyn provides intriguing insight into what students really mean when they use the "B"-word. Edwin Farrell of the City College of New York set out to gain some understanding of the lives of at-risk high school students, and of how school fit (or did not fit) into those lives.

Farrell trained a group of students to collect data by taping dialogues with their peers and recording some of their classes. In analyzing transcripts of the interviews, Farrell and his student collaborators identified two major themes: pressure and boredom.

Students referred frequently to social pressures in their lives. Like young people everywhere, they sought answers to big questions: Who am I? Where do I fit in? Specifically, these adolescents told stories about their struggles to establish their identities in a variety of realms: sexual, familial, peer, and occupational.

In contrast, most of them saw school as a "boring" diversion from their major concerns. It simply created one more pressure to deal with. Interestingly, no one even mentioned a possible connection between the worlds of school and work. At best, school was irrelevant.

Students described various strategies for escaping the boredom: one boy hid out in the boys' room; a girl cut classes to ride the subways with her friends. Walking through the schools, Farrell saw an even more common practice: many students were openly dozing in class.

Because "boredom" was such a frequent complaint in the initial training interviews with the student collaborators, Farrell instructed them to record examples of their "most interesting" and "most boring" classes. (Students were not to identify the teacher by name, but had to ask the teacher's permission to record the class.)

Farrell's collaborators had difficulty articulating why they found school so boring, but the tapes carried important hints. To Farrell's surprise, students seemed to distinguish interesting from boring classes on the basis of the process rather than the content of teaching. One of the "boringest" classes was devoted to a discussion of youth problems.

A pattern emerged: "Boring" classes began with the teacher collecting, giving back, or making assignments, handing back tests, and stating requirements. Regardless of the topic of the day's lesson, what seemed to stand out to the students was that they were being judged, and most likely would be found wanting. They were reminded—in the teacher's routines, comments, and grades on their papers—of the likelihood of continued failure.

Not surprisingly, students preferred classes in which the teacher set a relatively nonjudgmental tone. From past experience, these students had no reason to expect good grades. Most had failed courses before; many had been retained for at least one year. They felt pressure but saw no real promise of payoff. Farrell concludes that, for these students, boredom became a kind of "internal dropping out."

"The Bums of 8H"

I think being in school is important, but I can't seem to get into it... the next day comes up and the work still isn't done, then another zero go's in the grade book under my name. Motovation and Responsibly

are my two biggest hang ups. Sometimes I just do what my friends do and just sit and talk all period. Then pretend the grades don't mean anything to me. (student essay, class 8H)

Monica Richards, a middle-school language arts teacher in Kentucky, tried an experiment. While a student teacher led her other classes, Richards traveled through several days with "the self-styled bums of 8H." This was her lowest-achieving, most alienated class, and she wanted to learn more about what school was like for them.

After sharing her perceptions with the students in 8H, Richards asked them to work with her on a research project focusing on the question "What motivates you to learn?" The study lasted seven months, during which Richards made daily journal entries, taped many class activities, and interviewed students.

The results far surpassed Richards's expectations. She found that she had been wrong in her initial assumptions about how to deal with the negative attitudes and unmotivated behavior of 8H.

For example, when asked to rank-order a list of classroom strategies or practices that might motivate them, the students had little interest in a bonus-point system whereby the class earning the most points in a six-week period could choose a reward (such as a pizza party). Richards had thought they would rank it number one.

Instead, students claimed to be most engaged when the teacher "used a variety of resources to teach a concept," and when she sent "positive notes home" or praised them in class. Ironically, Richards had feared her students were much "too cool, too macho" for such strategies.

Students' comments about the largest inhibitors of motivation were also very telling. The top four were (1) comparing me with another student in class; (2) picking out a certain group of students as pets; (3) lack of trust in students; and (4) a teacher who always "cuts you down."

Earlier in the year, when going through the school day with 8H, Richards had seen them acting out their dislike of these kinds of classroom practice. Most of the class had disengaged from a lesson in which the teacher lectured and criticized some of them about their inability to fill out simple worksheets. Ironically, Richards notes, the topics of the worksheets were "self-concept," "relationships," and "stress management."

As the year went on, students participated more actively in Richards's class and performed better than they ever had before. She attributes this to the fact that "They had vowed to communicate and work together with me. We had common expectations."

What seemed to stand out to the students was that they were being judged, and most likely would be found wanting.

But this improved performance did not carry over to 8H's other classes—despite what students said about trying to do better in all subjects. In fact, report cards revealed that only 5 students raised their grade-point averages, 9 stayed the same, and 12 got lower grades. When Richards asked why, students complained about how hard it is to do better when the teachers "don't like us."

By the end of the experiment, Richards had learned a number of important lessons: "Clearly, I had wasted many days assuming 8H was incapable of deep reasoning. I was guilty of letting their outer appearance and low academic ability sway my attitude. I had underestimated them . . . they not only needed, but also appreciated a teacher who was both knowledgeable and caring."

"I Want Them to Learn"

I act differently in his class—I guess because of the type of teacher he is . . . he makes sure that nobody makes fun of anybody if they mess up. (Melinda)

He makes me want to work, he makes me want to give and do something . . . he show me that I can do it. (LaVonne)

Melinda and LaVonne, like the other students in Mr. Appleby's fifth-period class, have been assigned to basic English because of their low reading ability. They go to Brown/Hill County High School in Georgia. All of the school's students come from low-income families; most are black.

Absenteeism runs high at Brown/Hill, but not in Mr. Appleby's class. Students articulate clearly that they feel better—and smarter—during that class than in most of the rest of their day.

Deborah Dillon of Purdue University spent a year in one of Appleby's low-track classes, trying to understand how he creates such a "risk-free" environment. She attended class first on a weekly then on a daily basis, participating in class activities and talking with students. In regular conversations with Appleby during his planning period, Dillon probed for how he perceived and reflected on his own classroom practices.

In order to understand how students interpreted Appleby's actions, Dillon spent a great deal of time with three of them: LaVonne, Melinda, and Bernard. In addition to conducting both informal and structured interviews, she "went to school" with each of the three, sitting in on all of their classes and meeting their friends.

Drawing on these data, Dillon describes a low-track English classroom where students seem to thrive intellectually and socially. Her detailed portrait makes it possible to understand how one teacher established an open, "risk-free" environment.

Dillon's field notes and lesson transcripts reveal many instances of "relationship-building rituals" in which Appleby made each student feel special and worthwhile. Before and after class he spent time informally talking with students about their lives inside and outside of school. "He joined in on the student

conversations, answering questions, giving advice when it was asked for, joking . . . encouraging or supporting individuals when they needed it."

Clearly, this teacher has a winning personality. But in their comments, students focused more on his open and respectful attitude than on his ability to joke around. As Appleby himself stated his educational philosophy: "They need to know that when they walk into your classroom you'll say something nice to them . . . education isn't worth a hill of beans if the kid doesn't feel good about it or the kid doesn't feel good about himself or isn't going to do anything with his life."

During class, the judgmental routines so disliked by students in both Farrell's and Richards's studies were never in evidence. Appleby made himself available for individual questions or needs, and he sometimes shared his own background, concerns, and goals. But he took care to be "predictable and dependable," usually beginning class by reading aloud to students and following that with two or three reading or writing activities, many of which involved students in working cooperatively in small groups.

"I had underestimated them . . . they not only needed, but also appreciated a teacher who was both knowledgeable and caring."

Perhaps what is most striking in Dillon's portrait is how willing these young people were to work hard in Appleby's class. The work was by no means easy for them. In fact, contrary to the practice in many low-track classes, Appleby believed these students could and should be exposed to good literature. Confident that he could interest students in the themes, he was not afraid to introduce texts usually reserved for the "smart classes."

In a series of lessons on "The Old Man and the Sea," Appleby anticipated what his students might have trouble understanding. For example, when LaVonne asked "What is a marlin?" he was prepared, having brought in a picture of the fish. Each day, Appleby gave dramatic readings from the text, explaining new vocabulary and adding his own commentary to help the class comprehend what had happened and prepare for what was coming.

When unforeseen difficulties arose, Appleby would modify the assignment. In one class, he noticed students struggling with a worksheet on analogies, part of a review for the Basic Skills Test. He quickly called them together and told them to focus on the relationship between the given two words (for example, *save* is to *rescue* . . .) rather than on getting the answer (as *give* is to . . .). Only after they could explain the first relationship did he allow them to try to find the analogy.

Teachers Who Care

In explaining why they leave school, most dropouts offer, among many reasons, one clear and simple statement about their relationship to the school: "Nobody really cared." Conversely, asked to name the single most important feature characterizing a good school, most parents and students will say "Teachers who care."

The three studies reviewed here reinforce this message. Students need and want teachers who care about them personally and who convey respect for their capabilities—as students and as future workers and citizens. This conclusion is certainly not startling. But it is also not very popular today.

In the name of "high expectations," districts give more standardized tests, schools institute nonpromotion policies, and teachers step up the grade pressure. In terms of student motivation and disposition to learn, such policies may well be counterproductive.

Teachers face a number of related conundrums: How can I be open and caring and still maintain an orderly, rigorously academic classroom? How can I help low-achieving students feel successful without lowering my expectations? How can I make the curriculum more relevant to their lives without watering down the content?

Richards and Appleby have both found their own pathways through these dilemmas. In their actions and words they demonstrate that teachers need not choose between caring about and challenging their students. They point the way toward methods other teachers could use to develop their own solutions.

This was her lowest-achieving, most alienated class, and she wanted to learn more about what school was like for them.

Richards traveled through the school day with 8H. Appleby went even further, visiting students in their homes and talking to community workers who knew them outside of school. Neither teacher hesitated to talk openly with students about teaching or learning.

Teachers are rarely encouraged to frame and seek answers to their own research questions. But these studies remind us of how much there is to gain from this process of inquiry. Teachers and students can become collaborators—creating classrooms in which everyone feels capable and engaged.

For Further Information

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Girls: Drawbacks of Early Success?

Jane enters the classroom and goes straight to the teacher to show her a picture she drew last night. She remains at Ms. Gallo's side for as long as possible, engaging diligently in whatever activity is at hand, and—whenever the opportunity presents itself—helping to pass out papers or pencils, collect milk money, or even resolve a conflict between two classmates.

Dennis enters the classroom engaged in a shoving match with Joey. They are racing to see who can get to the block corner first. Dennis makes a face at Jane as she passes out the handwriting assignment, then reluctantly picks up a pencil, and within seconds has jumped up to head toward the pencil sharpener brandishing his broken point.

Stereotypes? To be sure. Most girls are not the teacher's pet, and most boys are not Dennis the Menace. But it does seem true that, in the early years of school, boys are more likely to end up in the principal's office and girls on the honor roll. Teachers and observers consistently note a sex-typed pattern of adjustment, with girls generally finding it easier to conform to the routines and expectations of the classroom.

But this does not mean that a classroom environment is good for girls and bad for boys. Ironically, the more closely girls resemble Jane, the more disadvantaged they may be. For example, it is evident to Ms. Gallo that Dennis has a problem controlling his impulses, and she reminds, instructs, and scolds him accordingly. Meanwhile, Jane may suffer from overcontrol, but she is not seen as having a problem. If anything, she is rewarded for her behavior, even though in the long run it may hamper her development of independence and self-esteem.

The very structure of the school day—with its division into required and free play segments—helps to determine whose deficits are noticed and addressed, points out Selma Greenburg of Hofstra University. Whether he wants to or not, Dennis has to participate in such verbal pursuits as show and tell, and in activities like cutting or painting that work on small muscle development. But Jane can avoid activities that might help her develop new strengths.

The mistakes made by third-grade boys were highly visible.

For example, activities that develop gross motor, exploratory, and spatial skills—like building with blocks, or catching insects for a terrarium, or playing cops and robbers on the playground—are often left to "choice time" or recess. Not surprisingly, when participation is voluntary, many children fall back on traditional sex-role patterns. As Greenburg notes, this situation involves double jeopardy for girls. The school does not require that they work on these skills, and they are blamed for not taking advantage of opportunities to do so.

A similar logic may help to explain why girls who start out doing much better than boys in math do not maintain this advantage. Comparing the patterns of math achievement and errors of boys and girls over a three-year period, Sandra Marshall and Julie Smith of San Diego State University found that as early as third grade many girls demonstrated well-developed and automatic rules for arithmetic operations. Boys, in contrast, often made mistakes in their application of rules and also tended to make errors from lack of attention to details.

While sixth-grade girls continued to excel in many arithmetic skills, boys had caught up or surpassed them in math achievement. In particular, girls had lost ground in solving problems that required an understanding of when to apply the skills at which they were proficient.

To explain this pattern, the researchers developed the following hypothesis: because the mistakes made by the third-grade boys were highly visible, teachers may have given them additional instruction and information—explaining not only the particular rule or procedure to use in that type of problem but also why and when that procedure might be used. The third-grade girls, meanwhile, got correct answers more often and more quickly than the boys. Thus their deficiencies (such as automatically applying a rule to a problem without necessarily undertanding the conceptual relations involved) went unnoticed and uncorrected.

This study, like Greenburg's work, spotlights an often overlooked population of students—the "Janes" who begin school most able to meet institutional expectations. It is important to ask whether their apparent strengths mask areas where they could use attention and help.

For Further Information

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THE HARVARD EDUCATION LETTER (ISSN 8755-3716) is published bimonthly for $26.00 per year by the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Longfellow Hall, Appian Way, Cambridge, MA 02138-3752. Second class postage paid at Boston, MA, and additional mailing office. POSTMASTER: Send address change(s) to The Harvard Education Letter, P.O. Box 8900, Braintree, MA 02184-8900.

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